

University of Dundee

## Reconceptualising Professional Knowledge

Kelly, Lynn

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**Title**

Reconceptualising Professional Knowledge: The Changing Role of Knowledge and Evidence in Social Work Practice

Author:

Lynn Kelly

University of Dundee

School of Education and Social Work

Dundee

UK

## Abstract

New socio-economic conditions have necessitated different approaches to professional learning and decision making and alternative perspectives are required to properly understand and engage with the complexity of the world of work, learning and doing. This paper considers the international literature in relation to professional learning in the context of evidence based practice and knowledge exchange and considers how we might overcome existing barriers to implement a more knowledge based approach to social work practice. By adopting Actor Network Theory and socio-material theories, this paper begins to consider alternative perspectives on professional learning and knowledge exchange as implementation in social work. The paper argues that the production of knowledge itself is not enough to guarantee that even the best knowledge will have any utility in practice and that we now need to search for more effective ways of generating and implementing new knowledge. Furthermore, more attention needs to be given to how current approaches to research design, dissemination and implantation could become more meaningful for practice.

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Word count ~~6296~~<sup>6997</sup> including references but excluding abstract and title

## Introduction

Learning can be conceptualised in many ways, but is increasingly being viewed as a form of participation and a process of doing and becoming, through engagement in social life (Perkins, 2013). This framework requires us to pay attention to not only the social, but also the institutional structures and the inherent power dynamics that exist within these bodies (Perkins, 2013). ~~To understand this context, we need to adopt a cultural approach to understanding learning.~~ Defined as 'the social practices through which people learn' (James and Biesta, 2007, p.30), learning cultures demand that we recognise not only the social practices that determine the learning culture in different organisations, but also the ways in which this impacts on professionals as learners. Crucially, learning becomes viewed as a social practice, taken to be 'thoroughly practical and involv[ing] not simply the human mind but the living human being in continuous interaction with its environment' (James and Biesta, 2007, p. 30). This holistic view of professional learning is not one which has been properly considered in the context of social work. Traditionally evidence based practice (EBP) has been at the core of professional education and learning in social work in the UK and internationally, in countries such as the United States, Canada, Australia and Hong Kong (Leung,2014; Morago 2006). The merits of using evidence practice decision making are acknowledged, however, this paper will argue that the limits of such an ~~approach have contributed to a learning culture that privileges some forms of knowledge above others, rendering invisible knowledge that is less formal or tacit and which is located within the spheres of practice and service user experience.~~ approach now necessitates consideration of more participatory and democratic models of knowledge sharing.

### *Evidence Based Practice and Professional learning in Social Work*

~~The push by~~ Within the UK, ~~this the move towards EBP in social work can be traced back to the 1990s when Tony Blair and Jack Cunningham, the then Prime Minister and Cabinet Secretary, published their paper entitled 'Modernising Government'. In this they advocated for government departments~~ in the UK and internationally witness ~~to make better use of evidence and research in policy making (Blair and Cunningham, 1999). Around this time we also saw the rise of the service user movement. The emphasis on the roles and views of those~~

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~~who used social services can be linked to the changing political ideology at the time which was moving towards a 'mixed economy approach to public welfare services (Beresford, 2000, p.492). The link between EBP and the modernising agenda of the New Labour government~~ has had the consequence of associating EBP with notions of efficiency, accountability and regulation, no more so than within the domain of child protection social work, where at this time we saw an unprecedented increase in inquiries and media scrutiny (Ferguson, 2009; Webb, 2002).

However, the pursuit of evidence was more than just about the application of research, but a moral imperative in relation to the knowledge base and practice of social work. Furman (2009) also reminds us that the privileged position of certain forms of evidence above others may prove contrary to ethical practice. **For example, an over reliance on empirical evidence can reduce the reflective aspect of social work practice and ignore the views and aspirations of service users who may require additional support in achieving their goals. It is however recognised that contemporary EBP recognises that service user values and beliefs can and do effect clinical judgements (Michaels, McEwen and McArthur, 2008). However, it is worth reiterating that In summing up the contested ethical positions regarding the use of EBP, it and it is ethically imperative that the social care workers must -uses his/her professional the evidence should be applied and how this might impact on the needs and desires of the service users. Ferguson (2003) and Ingram (2013) develop this further in their analysis of the**

**Commented [lk4]:** Reviewer 1 attack on EBP has been modified to reflect that contemporary EBP addresses client values and beliefs

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~~-The social care task is therefore more than the mere processing of problems and establishing outcomes, it is also about process and relationships.~~

Barriers to implementing evidence into practice are well known in the literature and will not be rearticulated here in their entirety. However, one of the most common and perhaps surprising issues is the psychological barriers that impede dissemination. Bellamy *et al* (2006) refer to these psychological barriers as knowledge barriers. Knowledge barriers reflect the lack of skills and awareness that practitioners often experience in relation to accessing, understanding and critically evaluating research findings (Mullen and Bellamy, 2008;

Mullen and Streiner, 2004). These findings are similar to those outlined by Peterson *et al* (2011) and Cree *et al* (2014) where students reported a similar lack of confidence in relation to their analytical skills but also noted that their limited access to high quality research literature that made the task of locating relevant evidence problematic.

Another related barrier is the time lag that it takes for research to be published. Thyer (2004) puts the time lag at about three to four years, but Bellamy and colleagues suggest that in some cases there can be a fifteen-year lag between the research taking place and the publication of the results (Bellamy *et al*, 2006). While the time lag represents a significant barrier, it is also concerning to note that social workers often feel that the research and evidence does not in fact reflect questions that social workers need answered. However, Gibbs and Gambrill (2002) suggest that the root of this problem can lie in social workers' difficulty in actually formulating questions that have knowable answers; this of course speaks to a lack of critical thinking skills that has been outlined above. Also, within the UK, the focus of research dissemination networks has been the development of web-based facilities and resources, yet access to information technology varies enormously across social service organisations and many practitioners have little or no access to digital resources (Barratt, 2003; Leung, 2014).

#### *Alternative Perspectives on Professional Learning*

It appears then that the overarching problem remains to be a 'lack of fit between research knowledge and the context of practice' (Bledsoe-Mansori *et al*, 2011,p182). The need to develop research capacity and to understand how to apply it to practice is a priority for the future. The skills required to work effectively within and across communities are not dissimilar to those required to access and analyse research literature. Problem solving, decision making, re-framing and negotiation are all highly applicable within the research arena. Worthy of note is Fenwick's view that it is not sufficient to simply train the individual or for individuals to merely develop competencies but to consider the 'collective capability' of the organisation (Fenwick, 2014). Fenwick appears here to be utilising the literature from human development where the sense of community and collectivism is well developed and where the concept of development is viewed as a process for expanding the capabilities of individuals. However, this process is dependent on the social and political contexts in which people live.

**Commented [1k5]:** Reviewer 1 – time lag from study to publication may delay availability of EBP but does not negate its utility or meaning. I would argue that the time lag between research being conducted and being made available to practitioners is a flaw of the EBP approach as it fails to recognise that practice changes quickly and research findings often lag behind what has already become common practice in the field. Time delays also fail to recognise that over time resources can and do become less available and therefore the practice that has been written about is no longer possible in the field. EBP does not fully recognise that resources, either time or availability of IT etc do impact on the confidence that the practitioner has in research findings

**Commented [1k6]:** Reviewer 1 – access to contemporary science is a practical resource matter and not a critique of EBP – I have made no changes to this argument as it has been supported by other authors – I believe that for EBP to be of value in the workplace then it needs to reflect the realities and context of contemporary practice which includes resource issues – failing to take this into account is in my view a failing of the approach  
Reviewer 2; comment 3 – this section has been reduced to remove some of the well-rehearsed discussion about EBP

Ibrahim (2006) believes that by emphasising the importance of social structures and collective agency, we can move beyond individual capacity building to a new form of capability that she refers to as ‘collective capability’.

~~While much of this work is dedicated to better understanding how those living in developing countries can improve their circumstances, this literature provides an interesting lens through which to consider how under current financial constraints, organisations can more creatively seize opportunities to create new ways of working and learning.~~

Collective capabilities are more than just an aggregation of individual capabilities, rather, representing something new that can only come about under the circumstances of social collective interactions (Stewart, 2005). Fenwick (2014) picks up on the potential for collective capabilities to be developed within organisations, where the web of relationships and social interactions shift the focus of opportunities for learning from the individual to the collective body. Drawing on socio-material theory again, it is evident that the relationships between individuals and the material things which exist within the professional context can generate opportunities for a more expansive understanding of professional learning, where all actors, human and non-human impact on the potential for growth of organisational collective capability which relies less on the capabilities of the individual and more on the organisational culture where learning and knowledge generation and dissemination can occur at all levels and across all domains of the organisation.

#### *Actor Network Theory*

We can see then that learning occurs in social spaces and that practice knowledge is above all a social activity involving both human and non-human actors who all have a part to play in enhancing the collective capability of an organisation.

~~What has become clear, however, is that the current approach to sharing knowledge and learning in social care is insufficient.~~

Our reliance on the random diffusion and dissemination of research literature is unlikely to adequately inform staff or improve client services and we now need to consider alternative approaches to creating and sharing knowledge. It is argued then that present arrangements for sharing knowledge, such as, didactic training courses, on-line portals, conference presentations, academic journals, policy statements and post-qualifying courses, with their focus largely on the transfer of knowledge, have limited impact on the behaviour of social workers.

The issues within social work regarding professional learning include the need to ensure a stable and well-informed workforce, how to enhance mechanisms that support inter-agency working and social networking, and explore how to cultivate an ethos of service innovation, how to better embed research into practice and how to most effectively evaluate and share knowledge that emerges from practice. ~~The complexity of the task is something that Hood (2014) highlights in relation to social work in children's services and Fenwick (2013) reflects in relation to professional work in a contemporary context.~~ However, the apparent contradiction of striving to achieve targets and deliver predetermined outcomes within tight timescales and the need to identify, collate, analyse and implement the research data makes for a problematic relationship between EBP and complex practice tasks and processes. The need, therefore, is to identify some form of compromise that addresses the needs of practice, while ensuring the relevancy of academic research, is imperative if social work is to progress in an effective and efficient way. By drawing upon the connected and dynamic theories of Actor Network Theory (ANT) and Social Network Analysis (SNA), we can begin to consider the wider social and material context social work practice and the factors that both enable and inhibit the development and sharing of knowledge.

ANT challenges the view that learning should be reduced to something that is intrinsic within the individual, but rather directs us towards something that is situated within a social world. ANT steers us away from categorising learning as merely a list of criteria or competencies, towards thinking about learning as something that is collective, situated and interactive, where knowledge can be co-constructed between actors and materials (Law, 2009; Mulcahy, 2012). This recognition of the complexities of learning assist us to better understand how the barriers that prevent EBP from being more widely adopted in social work practice might be overcome, most particularly in relation to the political context which dictates the resources available to the practitioner, the role of the organisation which supports the practitioner and the complex world of those who use social work services

~~This collaborative approach shifts the focus of learning from solely the individual towards the individual within a social context.~~ Recognising the social and material context of learning demands that we also recognise the institutional contexts in which people work (Lattuca, 2002). Understanding the institutional elements of professional learning is vital in relation to

Commented [Ik7]: Reviewer 2 – paragraph 3 ANT and EBP



considering how new learning-evidence might become embedded within the institution, and in considering how expert knowledge can be exchanged between those professionals working within these institutions. Moving beyond the institution itself, Leander *et al* (2010, p.330) consider learning to be something that is mediated and ‘not contained within individual minds, but rather distributed across persons, tools and environments’. Adopting an ANT approach, Mulcahy talks of the ‘more than human dimensions’ of professional learning (Mulcahy, 2012, p.121). Learning comes to be conceptualised as a performative knowledge practice constituted and enacted by people and tools in complex assemblages, where we come to understand professional learning as more than something that an individual does.

Returning to EBP, it is useful to consider the Drury- Hudson (1999) model for depicting the inter-relationship between different types of knowledge and how this impacts on a practitioners’ use of evidence in the decisions they are called upon to make and the Shlonsky and Gibb’s (2004) model for EBP. Each model outlined the role of empirical or ‘best evidence as well as highlighting the place of practitioner experience, or practice wisdom. However, ANT alerts us to the fact that professional learning is socially mediated and therefore it is insufficient to assume that the practitioner will incorporate all spheres of the modules and interpret this knowledge in the traditional and academic sense in which it is outlined in the academic literature. This problem of interpretation of evidence and the translation of evidence into practice lies at the heart of EBP and ANT provides us with a useful framework from which to consider how we might address these problems.

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### *Social Network Analysis*

Challenging the established individualised, psychological perspective, where learning is primarily seen in terms of the intrinsic capabilities or potentialities of people, SNA forces us to recognise the influence that both the social and the material have in relation to professional learning. By simultaneously considering the human and non-human actors, we render false the traditional dichotomy between ‘professional knowing (education) and doing (work)’ and make explicit the forms of power that influence traditional professional learning domains (Mulcahy, 2012, p.121).

Given that we now understand professional learning to be something that is situated in the social performance of practice, SNA maps out how actors interact with each other in organisations or in society and makes explicit patterns and networks of communication and interactions, social groupings, friendship, and group behaviours as they take place over space and time (Merchant, 2012). The map of these networks gives insight into the relationships and can help us identify who the key actors are in terms of transmitting new information, and the gaps in the network that prevent its transmission (Pow, *et al*, 2012). Traditionally SNA has been used within sociology to research groups that are hard to reach, such as sex workers and drug users (Latkin, *et al*, 2003), but Pow *et al* (2012) suggest that despite the usefulness of the approach, care needs to be taken to also consider its limitations. These authors point to the fact that those on the margins of society are always going to be cautious about revealing their contacts and, indeed, networks can reveal the structural inequalities and divisions in our society. This argument also holds true for professional networks, where some professionals might find themselves struggling to engage with new knowledge and may be just as reticent about both engaging in new networks and in revealing their own networks, or indeed their lack of professional networks. We therefore need to consider which people ‘make visible their social networks’ (Greenhow, *et al*, 2009, p.255).

With this in mind, the educator or researcher may only have partial information about the relationships at play and needs to consider the possible significance of these unreported or missing actors. Similarly, SNA was not initially conceived to consider professional networks, and therefore does not offer an adequate account of the organisational and management aspects of professional networks. Despite this caution, SNA, in line with Actor-Network Theory (ANT), provides an alternative to the view that the personal attributes of the individual, such as their level of influence and character, are more important than the relationships and links with other actors and the strength of the networks that they engage in. By emphasising the interdependence of individuals, SNA and ANT can act as a bridge between these micro- and macro-sociological problems and can demonstrate for us how the relationship between both material and non-material actors works. This shift in emphasis, from the primacy of the role of the teacher, to a more sophisticated perspective that includes the socio-material aspects of education, helps us to better understand the place of materials such as text, technologies, institutions and space, in the learning process. This approach does

however demand that attention be paid to the material conditions in which professionals learn, and consequently shifts responsibility from the teacher and individual learner back to the institution and those who can control or influence the social and material world in which learning and practice need to take place.

Realising that humans exist in a network of relationships, both human and non-human, where the social order is continually being negotiated and redefined, we begin to see power within society as something that is not located within the individual, but as something that is negotiated and ‘distributed between actors in a network and arises as a result of the collective action of the actor-network’ (Jackson, 2015, p.13). We can therefore see that human action alone is not sufficient to ensure coherent societies or networks: objects provide the structures in which human engagement takes place. In relation to adult learning, we can imagine an extensive list of non-human actors, including such objects as universities, colleges, libraries, technology, texts and so forth. More widely, the network can include the organisations in which people work, the regulatory requirements for training and education, and the cultural, social, fiscal and political environments in which practice takes place. While being mindful not to become enmeshed in the potential minutiae of possible contributory material factors, we can clearly see that professional learning is not a simple linear relationship between the cognitive capacity of the individual and their ability to understand what is required of them, but becomes a complex interrelated web of power relationships between all actors, both human and non-human. This understanding allows us to question who or what determines the nature of professional knowledge, controls the mechanisms for accessing this knowledge and sets the standards for acceptance and recognition within the profession.

### *Knowledge Exchange*

Fazey *et al.* (2014) ~~in their discussion about the role of knowledge transfer (sic) in interdisciplinary conservation research,~~ states s that it is no longer sufficient to simply just produce more evidence but we also need to better understand how to bring about change through research and to facilitate new ways of engaging in this process. For this to happen, it is important to firstly consider how knowledge is perceived and problems are framed within a

profession or organisation. ~~Approaches to knowledge transfer are strongly influenced by an~~ culture of the organisation, making them more aware of the merits of different types of knowledge. Within the academic community, this move to a more participatory form of knowledge building is increasingly being recognised by funding bodies who now want to see their funds being used in ways that have the highest economic and social impact. This move has become so significant that it has become an area of research activity itself, with fields such as 'implementation science, knowledge translation, knowledge management and research impact' all having emerged over the last few years, with 'knowledge exchange' becoming a particularly well utilised concept (Fazey *et al.* 2013: 205).

Knowledge exchange is not a tool, rather it has been defined as 'a process of generating, sharing, and/or using knowledge through various methods appropriate to the context, purpose, and participants involved' (Fazey *et al.* 2013, p.20). ~~Knowledge exchange covers a broad range of concepts such as co-production, transformation, integration, social learning and translation, each with a different meaning to different groups (Fazey *et al.* 2013). While recognising that there is still some way to go to improve communication between academia and other sectors, and a lack of large-scale evaluation of knowledge exchange processes in action, there has been a definite shift in the discourse away from hierarchical mechanisms towards a more creative and inclusive approach (Pentland *et al.* 2011). Neither is~~ Knowledge exchange is not just about the exchange or transfer of knowledge between experts. More constructivist approaches view the development of knowledge as something that is social and collaborative in nature, where knowledge is constructed through mutual learning and multi-stakeholders interactions. This position is entirely consistent with both ANT and SNA principles. The challenge then is for researchers to be more aware of their epistemological positions and how these can impact on the design of their knowledge transfer mechanisms. ~~(Fazey *et al.* (2014) state that currently too much research relies on overly~~ simplistic notions of how knowledge is shared and how people learn and claim that knowledge is rarely acquired in the ways anticipated in traditional dissemination activities as outlined in academic research projects. For social work researchers it is no longer acceptable to merely conduct research and publish our findings. We are now required to consider how to deliver outcomes that will have a positive impact for our communities. For this to happen, we need to consider how to create more participatory co-production and co-management methods of engagement, with greater attention on improving systems for knowledge exchange. This is particularly important when engaging in multi-disciplinary research where

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different professions will have different epistemological assumptions about knowledge exchange.

### From Rhetoric to Implementation

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The move towards impact is good news for social work research and practice. Internationally, universities are having to demonstrate high levels of social impact to secure funding. As an academic discipline, social work excels in areas such as, interdisciplinary, cultural and social contexts, community engagement, and a commitment to social change, while the link to practice enables practitioners to play a leading role in the implantation of research findings in the context of service users, organisations and policy (Sharland, 2011). However, as yet these contributions have been rarely recognised either within the academy or in practice (Nurius and Kemp, 2012). Echoing earlier calls for greater collaboration between the academy and social work agencies and practitioners, (Bledsoe-Mansori *et al.*, 2011), Nurius and Kemp (2012) urge us to consider how we can better develop more reciprocal arrangements whereby universities and practitioner, practice organisations and policy makers can come together to consider the research needs and methods of inquiry and implementation for future social work research. Not only would a more collegiate approach assist the academy to meet the demands for greater impact, but it would simultaneously ensure the ‘buy-in ‘ of the profession and create a short cut to effective implantation (Dankwa-Mullan *et al.*, 2010). Additionally, universities may also consider alternative models for recruiting academic staff that includes secondments and job sharing with practitioners and policy makers. While this happens in pockets across the UK, in other disciplines, this model of recruitment is mandatory. The increasing complexity of social life and the lives of those who use social work services requires a blend of knowledge and skills that can no longer be acquired in one domain, and more fluid relationships need to be considered between the academy and practice to challenge the somewhat insular view of universities and practice about their role in the context of knowledge and how it might make a difference to the lived experiences of those who rely on social work services.

Of course, social work policy makers and agencies have an equal role to play in the generating new knowledge and implementing new discoveries. Urgent consideration needs to be given to the lack of research funding for social work activities and knowledge exchange activities and ggovernments and employers need to address the lack of training and resources that are available to staff to ensure that they can effectively engage in knowledge sharing activities.

### **Conclusion**

For the exchange and implantation new of knowledge to be successful we need to pay attention to the key facilitators in professional networks, and this is not the same as identifying the managers and trainers, but instead, looking for motivated team leaders, practitioners and service users who can be encouraged to develop the skills required to broker

relationships and networks that can encourage knowledge transfer. These skills include understanding group dynamics, working in multi-disciplinary teams, stakeholder engagement and project management, making sense of data and negotiating meaning. However, the impact of the current financial climate on social work practitioners and the lack of investment in professional education and training have led us to a situation where there is more for social workers to do, but in less time and with fewer opportunities for reflection and new learning. Never before have we so much needed to find innovative and adaptive responses to the needs of the profession.

Ioan (2010) talks about the need for 'adaptive expertise', that is, practitioners who can employ a range of cognitive and personal attributes that enable them to be actively engaged in the process of change, to recognise what they did and why and to be able to articulate the impact of their actions on others. In order to ensure that learning can occur within organisations it is important that the correct conditions are in place to support it. We can no longer assume learning will 'just happen' (Fazey *et al.* 2005). Learning needs to be linked to experience, understanding and opportunity and new ways need to be found to better consider the ways in which we foster both within social services organisations.

Research continues to have only a limited impact on day-to-day social care practice and many different reasons are suggested for this, from the difference in values and attitudes that exist between the research community and practice, to the unavoidably imprecise nature of social care knowledge which is consequently undervalued by policy-makers (Davies *et al.* 2012). An oversimplification of the dissemination and implementation process both misrepresents the process and hampers the search for more effective implementation models (Davies *et al.* 2000). While this statement was written more than a decade ago, I will argue that is still holds true today. Any attempt to better understand the exchange of knowledge from research to practice is unlikely to include the less formal forms of knowledge such as practice knowledge, service user knowledge or the media. Most researchers still conduct their research and devise dissemination strategies in ways that will enhance their status within the academy and have little regard to how they can make a contribution that is relevant and accessible to the practice community.

Arguably, for the current social services workforce, the introduction of web-tools and social media is unlikely to make any significant impact on the dissemination of professional knowledge. Due to the failure of social service organisations to address the lack of access to technology and the low levels of confidence in their workforce, it is unlikely that digital attempts at enhancing learning will have anything more than minimal impact. Digital approaches also fail to recognise the very real organisational issues that prevent staff from not only accessing technology but having the time and support to utilise it effectively (Kitson *et al.* 1998, Barratt 2003, Rycroft-Malone *et al.* 2004). In a similar vein, the move by academic publishing houses to adopt an 'Open Access' approach to academic publications is similarly welcome, but again this does not recognise the issues outlined above. It has been argued that if research is to be relevant to social work practice then we need to think carefully about the nature of the interactions between all stakeholders and to better understand how we can co-produce knowledge to ensure that a diverse range of voices not only participate in our research but offer a multifaceted approach to sharing this knowledge. Despite our attempts, it is evident that much of the knowledge produced by the academy stays within the academy and this is no longer a viable proposition. Gray and Schubert (2012) and Gray *et al.* (2013) argue that the production of knowledge is not in itself enough: of equal importance is knowledge exchange and implementation.

Funding requirements aside, there is a moral imperative for those of us working in social work to ensure that our research represents the views of those who not only deliver social services, but those who are in receipt of them. Of course service user knowledge has existed for as long as welfare systems have been in place, however, what is now different is the extent to which practitioners and welfare organisations are required to pay attention to the experience of service users (Beresford 2000). Continuing, Beresford (2000, p.493) argues that service users' 'knowledge is inextricable from their experience'. For this to become anything other than tokenistic, we need to begin to consider how we can engage in more creative and innovative research methodologies that include the views of service users from the very beginning of the research process, including defining the research questions, method, the data gathering and final analysis and recommendations. While it is recognised that some social scientists are working in this way, for example Fazey and Fenwick, there is a need for these approaches to become more common in social work. The work of Cree *et al* (2014) has demonstrated that a collaborative and participatory approach to knowledge exchange can reap

a range of benefits for both practitioners and academics while also retaining a service user perspective. This paper has demonstrated that by adopting a knowledge exchange approach, we not only enrich our research but will generate a hermeneutic circle of knowledge and reflection to ensure that we produce research that is not only relevant, but that pays attention to how professionals learn and apply this learning to their practice. The goal of hermeneutic phenomenology is to ‘reveal a totality of meaning in all its relations’ (Gadamer 2004:487). Knowledge exchange approaches offer social work an opportunity to reveal knowledge that is too often obscured by traditional approaches to EBP and social work research and training.

It is now self-evident that the production of knowledge itself is not enough to guarantee that even the best knowledge will have any utility in practice. Social work now needs to more carefully consider alternative approaches and knowledge exchange science seems to provide a useful perspective from which social work can begin to consider more carefully the processes in which formal and informal forms of knowledge become known and shared across all domains of the social work task. Social work must now attend to the meanings that professionals make of the professional contexts in which they work and how this impacts upon them and their practice. This knowledge has been untapped by the academic community. To do this we need to better engage with practitioners about what it is that they know and what it is that they need to learn and what needs to happen to allow this to occur. We also need to recognise the crucial knowledge and experience of those who use social services, as they are uniquely privileged in their perspective.



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